

Haiti in Crisis



READ TO DISCOVER

- What were the conditions in Haiti before the January 2010 earthquake?
- How have the United Nations and other international organizations been involved?
- What are the threats to stability for the future?

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The nation of Haiti has faced many problems throughout its history, especially in recent years. Haiti is often called a “failed state” and has received a lot of international attention.

Haiti has not been able to establish a stable government or political system. **Infrastructure** throughout the country is poorly developed and as a result, many people cannot access basic services such as clean water. Conflicts with its island neighbor, the Dominican Republic, make it difficult for Haiti to work with other nations. These problems, among others, have left Haiti the poorest nation in the Western Hemisphere. To address this, the United Nations has been heavily involved in Haitian development.

Terms & Concepts

Infrastructure:

system of services, facilities and institutions, such as roads, schools, sanitation, and communications



Before and after the earthquake, it is often the Haitian children who are most affected.

Source: UNDPⁱ

On January 12, 2010, a massive earthquake shook the capital city of Port-au-Prince. With the capital destroyed and its 10 million citizens devastated, much of the progress made before the earthquake had massive setbacks. Even UN workers were affected.

Nearly one year later, the nation and its population are still threatened by government instability, a weak economy, and social problems. The earthquake did not create these problems, but it made them impossible for the international community to ignore. The UN Security Council is faced with the task of pulling Haiti from the depths of despair by not simply building back from the earthquake, but by building back better.

HISTORY OF THE ISSUE

THE “FAILED STATE”: INSTABILITY AND INEFFECTIVENESS

Political Problems

Until January 1, 1804, Haiti was a colony of France. In the 1790s, African slaves rebelled against the French led by a freed slave named Toussaint L’Ouverture. It is the only nation to successfully emerge from a slave revolt.

Unfortunately, the revolution did not lead to political stability. In its history, Haiti has experienced 32 **coup d’états**. This demonstrates how politicians, military leaders, and businessmen have fought for power.¹ Haiti has had **dictators**, such as the Duvalier family who ruled the country from 1957 to 1986. Finally, foreign governments have frequently interfered and occupied the nation.



The National Palace (government headquarters) collapsed in the earthquake, but the political system was already weak.

Source: UNDPⁱⁱ

Groups in control of Haiti in the 1990s reestablished democracy, but the democracy was weak. Ruling officials were often corrupt and stole national money.² Leaders used violence to control the population. Citizens’ **human rights** were regularly violated. Government policies were unsuccessful and did not reach the general population. The atmosphere of political instability and violence trickled down to all parts of Haitian life.

Terms & Concepts

Coup d’état:

forceful overthrow of a government

Dictator: ruler with unrestricted control of the government

Human rights:

rights to which all humans are entitled

Economic Problems

Political instability has affected the economy. Money is controlled by a small group of very wealthy people. The rest of the country lives in poverty. The UN Development Programme estimates that 78% of Haitians live on less than \$2 per day.³ Many people cannot find jobs to earn money. Financial need pushes some Haitians to join gangs or enter the drug trade, adding to the violence.

The government struggles with the weak economy and has little money for social programs. Haiti has to import many products, like food, machines, and oil. Because Haiti buys more than it sells, Haiti owes money to other countries.

Humanitarian Problems

There are an overwhelming number of social problems attached to Haiti’s

¹ Kelemen, Michele. “Haiti Starts Over, Once Again.” *NPR* 2004. <<http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=1741707>>.

² Corruption Perceptions Index 2009. Transparency International.

<http://www.transparency.org/policy_research/surveys_indices/cpi/2009/cpi_2009_table>.

³ “Human Development Report.” UN Development Program. 2006. p. 293.

poverty. Contagious diseases are widespread. Education is limited, especially for women. Crime is common; security forces are poorly prepared to deal with gangs. Local organizations often go unheard by the government. With an inefficient and corrupt political system, Haitians must rely on international organizations to provide services such as health care.

Cité Soleil: Dire Conditions in the Haitian Slums

Haiti's problems are visible in the slums of Cité Soleil. The area is called a *shanty town* because its houses are made from scrap materials, like plastic. There is no sanitation, no electricity, and few educational or medical services. It is home to 300,000 people. However, Haiti's government and National Police have little influence. Instead, Cité Soleil is controlled by gangs. During politically unstable times, the crime and violence in Cité Soleil resembles war. Most international organizations will not enter Cité Soleil because of its reputation as one of the most dangerous places in the world.



Child walks through trash in Cité Soleil.

Source: CyberAnthⁱⁱⁱ

UN INTERVENTION

During the 1990s, the United Nations (UN) and the OAS (Organization of American States) sent six missions to Haiti to stabilize the fragile democracy.⁴ The **mandates** of these missions included: observing fair elections, protecting human rights, supporting government policies, and training police. They had some success but no significant, long-term changes.

Following a period of failing security and political opposition, a 2004 coup d'état forced then President Jean-Bertrand Aristide from government. The UN Security Council sent in a new **peacekeeping** force: the *UN Stabilization Mission in Haiti* (MINUSTAH).

MINUSTAH has had greater success than the previous missions. MINUSTAH ensured security during the return to democracy with the 2006 election of René Préval. The mission also works to restore peace and stability. To do this, MINUSTAH troops work closely with the government and the Haitian National Police. Over the years, the UNSC has reevaluated MINUSTAH to adjust plans and troop numbers to best meet Haiti's needs.

Terms & Concepts

Mandates: official plans or commands

Peacekeeping: UN activity of volunteers and troops entering a nation to build or maintain peace

⁴ United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti. <<http://www.un.org/en/peacekeeping/missions/minustah/background.shtml>>.

POTENTIAL FOR POSITIVE CHANGE

By 2009, many experts were optimistic about Haitian development.⁵ The United Nations increased MINUSTAH troop numbers and appointed former United States President Bill Clinton as the Secretary-General's *Special Envoy for Haiti*. The Inter-American Development Bank helped raise \$770 million in aid.⁶ The Haitian government developed a tourism strategy to attract foreign shoppers who could buy local goods and help the economy. Elections were planned for February 2010.

Terms & Concepts

Aid: money or materials given to a country in need

JANUARY 2010 - THE EARTHQUAKE

On January 12, 2010, a powerful earthquake struck near the capital city Port-au-Prince. The area was home to 3.5 million people. In total, 222,570 were killed, 300,000 were injured, and more than 1 million were left homeless.⁷

DISCUSSION OF THE PROBLEM

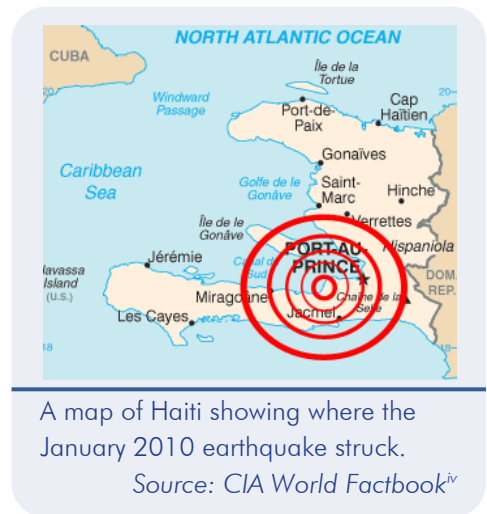
THE SHORT-TERM EFFECTS

Haiti's People

Haitians who survived searched for missing family, for medical care, and for housing. 200,000 homes were damaged beyond repair. With aftershocks continuing for weeks, safe housing was rare. Many chose to sleep in tents or in streets. Others fled to neighboring villages and towns, and the Dominican Republic accepted thousands of people fleeing across the border.

Blows to Effective Response

Beyond the tragic loss of life, there were terrible effects on infrastructure. Port-au-Prince was flattened. Hospitals collapsed; those still standing accepted overwhelming numbers. Roads were blocked, the airport control tower was damaged, and communication lines were broken.



The damaged infrastructure slowed the international response. International organizations working in Haiti lost staff, buildings, and communication systems. Meanwhile, government institutions, already ineffective, could not respond quickly. Offices were destroyed. Many of the country's leaders died; remaining officials were dealing with family deaths and property damage.

⁵ Schoen, John W. "Quake crushes Haiti's economic revival." MSNBC 15 Jan. 2010. <<http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/34866872/>>.

⁶ Inter-American Development Bank. <<http://www.iadb.org/Haiti/index.cfm?id=6471&lang=en>>.

⁷ UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. <<http://ochaonline.un.org/>>.

THE CRISIS ONE YEAR ON

Peace, security, and stability are tied together. The progress and hope which existed before the earthquake now faces setbacks and new obstacles. After almost a year of work by Haitian and international organizations, the situation in Haiti remains critical.

“The urgency of the moment naturally dominates our planning. But...we must be thinking about tomorrow.... We must help Haiti **build back better**, working with the government so that today's investments have lasting benefit, creating jobs and freeing Haitians from dependence on the world's generosity.”

- United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, January 2010⁸

Political Conditions

Since they often have been seen as corrupt, violent, or inefficient since independence, Haiti's politicians are not trusted by the Haitian people. The earthquake raised new concerns about the strength of the political system. The government has been blamed for slow aid response. Aid distribution officials have been accused of accepting money from gangs rather than fairly dividing food and housing supplies.⁹ Some worry that money is not reaching Haitian people.

Following the earthquake, elections scheduled for February 2010 were postponed until November 2010. The new government will face many challenges while rebuilding the country, like ending political corruption. If successful, a future government could renew the faith of the Haitian people and of the global community.

Economic Conditions

Prior to the earthquake, the *Inter-American Development Bank* and similar international organizations were planning programs to encourage economic development and growth in Haiti. The government planned to attract foreign business and tourists who could spend money and create jobs.

Top Priorities for Rebuilding¹⁰

Short-Term Assistance:

- Safe shelter
- Food and clean water
- Sanitation system
- Security (especially for women & children)

Long-Term Reconstruction:

- Infrastructure
- Democratic government
- Women's rights
- Investment spread throughout Haiti in cities and countryside

However, the earthquake shifted the focus from long-term economic development to immediate needs. Some factories which shut down are still closed. Other workplaces were completely destroyed. Unemployment has grown because many people cannot find jobs. There has been a huge international response of donation and aid, but more is needed.

⁸ Ki-moon, Ban. “What I saw in Haiti.” *Washington Post* 19 Jan. 2010. <<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/01/18/AR2010011803513.html>>.

⁹ McMurtrie, Craig. “Haitian officials accused of ignoring aid corruption.” *ABC (Australian Broadcasting Corporation) News* 17 Mar. 2010. <<http://www.abc.net.au/news/stories/2010/03/17/2848869.htm>>.

¹⁰ Ki-moon, Ban. “Renewal, not restoration, should be the goal for Haiti.” *Washington Post* 29 Mar. 2010. <<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/03/28/AR2010032802352.html>>.

Humanitarian Conditions

In Haiti, poverty is a daily reality. Haiti lacks safe building regulations and many homes are built into the hillside where they are easily destroyed by earthquakes or floods. Terrible humanitarian conditions before the earthquake were magnified by the destruction. In January 2010, the poorest Haitians who struggled to find basic needs were the least able to help themselves.

Disease increased because of injury and limited food and clean water. Medical supplies had to be stretched. The UN and medical organizations struggle with the great number of diseases.



A UN truck travels in post-disaster Haiti.
Source: Agência Brasil⁹

Human rights have been difficult to uphold. Women are especially vulnerable to violence. Many children have been orphaned; schools and school resources are limited.

Security is a major problem. Earthquake survivors with the help of international volunteers created “tent cities.” The tents were meant to provide safe, *temporary* housing. Months later, the tents remain.¹¹ Many of these tent cities have no sanitation, no electricity, and little police security. This makes the tents a center of terrible social conditions. Additionally, the tents lack the safety measures which can protect people from future disasters.

ACTORS WORKING TO REBUILD HAITI

Neighboring Nation-States

Haiti often stands apart from countries around the world, because of its unique language and history. Despite these differences, many groups have a strong interest in Haiti, especially nations located nearby. People who leave Haiti to escape the terrible conditions go to neighboring Caribbean islands, Canada, the United States, and Europe. The result is that 1-2 million Haitians live outside of Haiti.¹² In the countries where they live, these groups of immigrants and refugees can influence the foreign policies towards Haiti.

The Dominican Republic, which occupies the eastern 2/3 of the island, has a particularly difficult relationship with Haiti. Historically, the border has been a place of conflict. More recently, the Dominican Republic has developed policies to stop the flow of Haitian earthquake refugees across the border.¹³

¹¹ Johnson, E. Thomas. “Haitians still wait for recovery.” *Los Angeles Times* 25 Jun. 2010. <<http://www.latimes.com/news/opinion/commentary/la-oe-johnson-haiti-20100625,0,4494526.story>>.

¹² Abrams, Elliott. “What Haiti Needs: A Haitian Diaspora.” *Washington Post* 22 Jan. 2010. <<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/01/21/AR2010012103508.html>>.

¹³ Fascar, Fanny. “Haitians ‘needed but not wanted’ by neighbor.” *CNN* 1 Apr. 2010. <<http://www.cnn.com/2010/WORLD/americas/03/31/haitians.dominican.republic/index.html>>.

Non-Governmental Organizations

Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are the primary sources of aid in Haiti. This aid can take the form of providing money or supplies, bringing in doctors, nurses and other healthcare workers, building houses, and a number of other activities. After the earthquake, NGOs raised millions of dollars in donations from people around the world.

There are more than 10,000 NGOs operating in Haiti. Some of the most well-known are: the International Committee of the Red Cross which specializes in emergency response, Doctors Without Borders (Médecins Sans Frontières) and Partners in Health, which provide medical care, and MADRE, a women's rights group.

Terms & Concepts

Non-governmental organization: not connected to a government; has a specific cause

The United Nations

Following the earthquake, the UN coordinated thousands of humanitarian response groups. To do this, they organized groups into different types of response—such as, food aid, health, shelter, etc. Collectively, the UN bodies follow Ban Ki-moon's strategy to "build back better." Major programs in Haiti include the *World Food Programme* (WFP), the *Children's Fund* (UNICEF), and the *Development Programme* (UNDP).

One WFP program has set up feeding centers for mothers and children who do not have access to good, healthy food.¹⁴ A healthy diet strengthens the body and prevents the easy spread of disease. Meanwhile, UNICEF reopens and rebuilds schools.¹⁵ School supplies were donated from around the world, and 3,000 tents were set up as temporary classrooms for learning. The UNDP has created programs to give Haitians jobs, such as clearing trash and repairing roads.¹⁶ These programs improve infrastructure and decrease unemployment.



The first Port-au-Prince building constructed after the earthquake was this orphanage.

Source: Agência Brasil^{vi}

PAST INTERNATIONAL ACTIONS

SECURITY COUNCIL RESOLUTION 1542 (2004)

The UN Security Council established the United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH) in June 2004 following a political coup d'état. MINUSTAH is a peacekeeping

¹⁴ Flores, Maria Gabriela. "Haiti: Feeding Children Fends Off Malnutrition In Slums." WFP 24 May 2010. <<http://www.wfp.org/stories/child-feeding-fights-malnutrition>>.

¹⁵ Carwardine, Edward. "Education brings hope to Haiti's children: 'Let us not lose any more.'" UNICEF 9 Apr. 2010. <http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/haiti_53280.html>.

¹⁶ UNDP. <<http://www.undp.org/haiti/>>.

operation mandated to help Haiti return to stability and democratic elections. However, unlike previous missions, MINUSTAH has been more successful at overseeing stability and government reform.

SECURITY COUNCIL RESOLUTION 1908 (2010)

In January 2010, the Security Council increased the number of MINUSTAH troops immediately following the earthquake to help coordinate the emergency relief efforts. During the earthquake, MINUSTAH's headquarters in Port-au-Prince collapsed resulting in more than 100 UN casualties.

SECURITY COUNCIL RESOLUTION 1927 (2010)

Following recommendations of the UN Secretary-General¹⁷, the UNSC increased peacekeeping forces in Haiti again, this time to 8,940 military personnel. The earthquake collapse of Haiti's major prison allowed major gang leaders back to escape. Additionally, "tent cities" and food distribution centers are areas which the Haitian National Police has had difficulty patrolling. MINUSTAH forces have acted to fill in the security gaps.

SECRETARY-GENERAL'S SPECIAL ENVOY FOR HAITI (2009)

In 2009, UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon established the position of Special Envoy for Haiti and appointed former United States President Bill Clinton. Unfortunately, the office suffered a setback when the earthquake struck in early 2010. The Special Envoy works with the Haitian government, international donors, foreign companies, and NGOs to "build back better."



Brazilian UN peacekeeper.
Source: United States Navy^{vii}

RECOMMENDATION FOR FORMULATING A RESOLUTION

The nation of Haiti, its people and government, face many serious concerns. Aid organizations, both NGOs and UN programs, have a difficult time identifying which problems to address first. It is not entirely clear what the objective should be for the UN. With no end in sight, some people question how long the Security Council's MINUSTAH mission should continue to work there. Others are critical that MINUSTAH focuses too much on security and not enough on aid distribution.

There are many risks to Haiti caused by current political, economic, and social conditions, as well as the additional threat of natural disasters. History has shown that government instability and corruption increases the number of social and humanitarian problems facing the people. Moreover, Haiti's problems can affect neighboring countries. How can the United Nations break this cycle?

¹⁷ See Section VI of his report to look at the five key areas in which MINUSTAH will work: "Report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti." S/2010/200. <http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/2010/200>.

The Security Council usually reacts to crises by:

- Seeking support from all UN agencies and humanitarian organizations;
- Encouraging increased political talks and meetings among nations;
- Promoting discussion to include all those involved in politics within the country;
- Increasing humanitarian aid.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- What relationship does your country have with Haiti?
- What sort of national response did your government have to the earthquake?
- Are you involved in MINUSTAH or any other programs taking place in Haiti?
- How does your country compare to the situation in Haiti in terms of politics, economics, and humanitarian concerns?
- Has your country ever been affected by natural disaster?

BLOC POSITIONS

EUROPE AND OTHER WESTERN COUNTRIES

Much of the aid to Haiti comes from the Western countries. They also supply volunteers and military troops. There are significant numbers of Haitians immigrants in these countries.

LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

Geographically, Haiti is a part of Latin America and the Caribbean. Through the UN and the *Organization of American States* (OAS), many of these countries have contributed aid, volunteers, and soldiers. Neighboring islands want to prevent instability from spreading beyond Haiti.

ASIA

In recent years, several nations in Asia have faced similar natural disasters to the Haitian earthquake (i.e. the 2004 tsunami). The UN took many lessons from these events as they responded to the earthquake. Haiti also serves as a wake-up call for the need of greater disaster preparedness.

AFRICA

In terms of political, economic, and humanitarian conditions, Haiti resembles several countries in Africa more closely than other regions. Successes and failures of the UN in dealing with the crisis in Haiti may offer lessons for similar peacekeeping and humanitarian operations in African nations.

RESEARCH SITES

MAJOR NEWS SECTIONS:

Nearly all of major news companies have developed sections of their websites for the Haitian disaster and the aftermath. Check out these sites for news articles, maps, photographs, and videos:

- BBC: http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/in_depth/americas/2010/haiti_earthquake/default.stm
- The Guardian: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/haiti>
- CNN: <http://www.cnn.com/SPECIALS/2010/haiti.quake/>
- Miami Herald: <http://www.miamiherald.com/haiti/>

UN NEWS CENTRE:

Check out this site for transcripts of UN meetings and conferences related to your topic and for up to the minute UN news for your country:

<http://www.un.org/apps/news/infocusRel.asp?infocusID=91&Body=Haiti&Body1=>

GOVERNMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF HAITI:

This site is devoted to the comprehensive rebuilding of Haiti. Check here for issues and updates about infrastructure and social issues:

<http://www.refondation.ht/index.jsp?sid=1&id=1&pid=1&lng=en>

THE UNITED NATIONS STABILIZATION MISSION IN HAITI (MINUSTAH):

This site contains facts, background information, and reports about the UN mission in Haiti:

<http://www.un.org/en/peacekeeping/missions/minustah/index.shtml>

IMAGE CREDITS

- ⁱ UNDP. 13 Jan. 2010. <<http://www.flickr.com/photos/unitednationsdevelopmentprogramme/4275397038/>>.
- ⁱⁱ UNDP. 13 Jan. 2010. <<http://www.flickr.com/photos/unitednationsdevelopmentprogramme/4274663582/>>.
- ⁱⁱⁱ CyberAnth. Jul. 2002. <http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Cite_Soleil_Haiti.jpg>.
- ^{iv} CIA. <<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ha.html>>.
- ^v Casal, Jr., Marcello. Agência Brasil 19 Jan. 2010. <<http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:EscombrosBelAir5whitebalanced.jpg>>.
- ^{vi} Casal, Jr., Marcello. Agência Brasil 21 Jan. 2010. <<http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:HaitiOrfaos.JPG>>.
- ^{vii} McNeeley, PO1 Chad J. US Navy. 26 Feb. 2010. <<http://www.defense.gov/PhotoEssays/PhotoEssaySS.aspx?ID=1587>>.